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ABSTRACT

In practically all countries, the governing bodies seem to be conscious of the important role the ability to read well plays in all educational activities. But the tremendous demand for education has far outpaced the supply. Since World War II, many new self-governing countries have been established of which most are illiterate. Since democracy in a real sense cannot be maintained in societies where the citizens are not even able to read a ballot form, there is also a strong political demand for improving reading ability. However, the number of adult illiterates is increasing at an enormous rate and educational progress has not been enough to keep pace with the rapid population growth. Whereas a new book is published every minute in the world today, book production is very unevenly spread around the world. Too, literacy campaigns in various parts of the world still seem to be based largely on a primer or series of elementary textbooks and some simple workbooks. The literacy program is often considered to be completed when the student has learned the alphabet and gone through the primers. The statistics on literacy in the world today should be viewed in light of the fact that there is a continuous evolution occurring everywhere with regard to definitions of literacy. Some mass campaigns aimed at the eradication of illiteracy have had remarkable success in some parts of the world; nevertheless there is still a great need for cross national comparative studies of different methods of reading instruction. A cooperative goal among countries should be efficient reading ability for at least 90% of the adult population in 90% of the various nations by 1990. (HOD)

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DEVELOPING READING ABILITY - A WORLDWIDE CHALLENGE: THE PRESENT SITUATION AND AN OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Address given at
World Congress on Reading, arranged by the International Reading Association in Manila, Philippines, August 1980.
Final Plenary Session

Eve Malmquist

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DEVELOPING READING ABILITY - A WORLDWIDE CHALLENGE: THE PRESENT SITUATION AND AN OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

All of us gathered here today are deeply concerned with one of the most important and vital issues of today's and tomorrow's world: reading ability and its role in thought formation, in problem-solving, and in personal self-fulfilment on a rich and a very broad scale of values. I am particularly pleased to think out loud with you on certain selected international aspects of reading ability and reading instruction - for reading ability and the teaching of reading is indeed not only of main interest for you and for me, in our own communities; it is a universal concern, a worldwide concern.

On this occasion I would like to make some assessments of where we have been during the past few decades, and where we stand at present. I would also like to attempt to transmit to you some of my ideas and thoughts about the directions into which we need to move as regards research and practices within this field, when we take into consideration the picture of the future society, as we might tolerably well project it from the trends we now can recognize, and from the research findings we now have on hand.

I will limit myself to some few features of the world situation now: 1. The progress of technology, changes of professions, need of retraining, and life long learning. 2. The literacy situation around the world. Some statistical figures. Book production and distribution. Availability of daily newspapers and other reading materials. 3. The problem of illiteracy. 4. Definitions of functional literacy. 5. An observed decline of standards of reading ability in several industrial countries. 6. Immigrants and functional literacy. 7. Needs of reading ability after the year 2000. 8. Some problems and questions for future literacy work. What can IRA do? What can we as individuals do? Some suggestions.

Substantial world-wide increases in enrollments of schools and colleges

In practically all countries around the world the governing bodies seem to be conscious of the extremely important role a good reading ability plays in all educational activities.

In spite of the technological revolution which brought us new media of communication, reading ability is still considered the learning instrument sine qua non. They also seem to be fully aware of the importance of a high literacy standard in a country in order to make use of the human resources available for economic, social and political progress as well as for individual fulfilment.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has many times in various resolutions since 1948 stated that the right to education is one of the fundamental rights of man, and that illiteracy is the most serious handicap for economic, political, social, and individual development that we know, a grave block to international understanding and cooperation, and the most stubborn threat to peace in the world of our time.

It seems natural and justifiable that now, some 30 years later, we try to form an opinion as to what extent equality of educational opportunity for all has been fulfilled. Everywhere education has had a high priority in national and international development programs. Substantial worldwide increases in enrollments of schools and colleges have been noted.

In the low-income nations the expansion has above all involved augmentations as regards the percentages of primary school-age children attending school. In the economically developed countries secondary and higher education have been considerably enlarged. But the tremendous demand for education has far outpaced the supply.

It is possible to state many reasons for the continued imbalance between demand and supply of education. Let us only indicate a few: The explosion of aspirations and expectations of education socially, economically and culturally - the rapid increase of the volume and complexity of knowledge - the population explosion and not least important - the strongly competing demands from many other areas, for instance for food and "defence".

The expansion within the field of education has in many cases been enormous, above all in quantitative terms. Dimensions such as student enrollment in

schools and universities, number of teachers at various levels, number of school buildings etc have been given priority in the discussions concerning school reforms in many countries. The main educational objectives have often been to give more and more people opportunities for education during longer and longer periods of their lives. During the last decade, however, the qualitative aspects of education and educational planning have more and more come into focus in an increasing number of countries, not least in Europe.

According to UNESCO's Office of Statistics, the enrollment of primary school students in the developing countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia as a whole increased between 1950 and 1975 from 65 million to 236 million, secondary school enrollment from 7.5 million to 67 million, and the enrollment of students at third level institutions from 0.9 million to 10 million. The number of schools built, the number of teachers at various levels trained and employed, the number and the great variety of educational equipment bought and used (and sometimes unused and misused) is indeed enormous.

The literacy situation around the world

The expansion noted is in many ways gratifying and the efforts put down to reach the outlined goals worthy of the greatest respect and admiration. But on the other hand we have to face some very dark parts in the picture of the world's educational status.

Around 50 percent of the world's children in school age (6 - 12 years of age) do not go to school at all and will consequently not learn to read there.

The map of low-income countries is to a great extent identical with the map of countries which have recently acquired national independence. These countries also have a high illiteracy percentage. The gap between them and the high-income countries is an ever-growing economic and political danger.

Illiteracy has always existed, but in the primitive society with its traditional pattern of living, reading inability was hardly a big handicap for the fulfilment of a human life. In our days, however, the enormously improved means of transportation and communication have brought people living in all corners of this earth closer and closer together. The use of the

results of the technical development has become more and more necessary for survival everywhere, and therefore illiteracy has become a more and more serious problem. There will be fewer and fewer jobs available for unskilled illiterate workers in any part of our technical civilisation of today.

It is true that the illiterate person can be taught a great many things, even if he lacks reading ability, but he has very limited possibilities to learn for himself. A life-long learning is a sine qua non for survival in any modern civilized society.

Since World War II many new self-governing countries have been established - comprising about 850 million inhabitans - of which the majority is illiterate. It seems to me selfevident that democracy in a real sense cannot be maintained in societies, where the citizens are not even able to read the ballot forms. We have, therefore, also a strong political demand for improved reading ability. Most regretfully, we have to admit that only small steps forward have been taken on the road toward the goal - literacy to all people around the world. The lack of reliable statistics makes it extremely difficult to assess the extent of illiteracy in various parts of the world.

The number of illiterates is increasing

According to UNESCO reports the percentage of adults (i.e. persons aged 15 and over) who are illiterate decreased from 44.4% in 1959 to 39.3% in 1960, to 34.2% in 1970 and in 1978 to 32%. But the absolute figures have increased from approximately 700 million adult illiterates 1960 to an estimated 860 million in 1980. Thus the number of adult illiterates is actually increasing at an enormous rate. This distressing fact is attributed to the circumstance that the educational progress, though considerable, has not been enough to keep pace with the rapid population growth. UNESCO estimates that the total world population is now increasing at about 2% a year. Population-increase rates are expected to continue to be greatest in areas where the percentage of school-age children enrolled in school is smallest: Africa, the Arab States, Asia and Latin America.

The world population will increase from around 4 000 million by now to around 6 300 million in the year 2 000. But of this increase only around 250 million is assumed to concern the developed countries. The population growth between the years 1980 and 2000 is expected to be 19% in the

developed countries and 70% in the developing countries.

A few examples as regards the frequency of illiteracy might be appropriate.

a. The illiteracy rate is estimated to be over 50% in 69 of the member countries of the United Nations;

b. In 20 countries more than 90% of the population is unable to read and write;

c. In many countries the female population is almost entirely illiterate;

d. And even more chocking, as many as eleven countries in Europe report a rate of illiteracy, ranging from 10% to 65% of the population at the age of 15 and above;

A new book published every minute

The yearly speed of growth is about 4% for the number of book titles and 6% for the number of copies.

A new book is published every minute in our world of today. The total number of copies printed exceeds eight billion per year. There are now produced three times as many books in the world per year as in 1950.

It is of great interest that we are able to make such a statement, contrary to what the mass-media prophet Marchal McLuhan says that the printed word has come into a "twilight-period" and that the so called Gutenberg galaxy is on its way to be extinguished and replaced by electronic communication systems. His predictions have, however, not been verified. The international book fair here in Manila just now give new evidence of the impressive growth of the printed word.

The book production is very unevenly spread around the world, however. Europe, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. produce together more than 75% of the books published throughout the world. In Europe, which has around 13% of the world population, there is produced more than 45% of the books. Asia is by now only producing around 20% of the books in the world, although it has 56% of the world population. Latin America and Africa produce no more than 2% <u>each</u> of the world's book production.

The book production in titles has increased considerably during the last 15 years also in Latin America, Asia and Africa, but because of the enormous population growth there the number of book titles per million readers

has actually decreased in those areas, where the needs are the greatest. Even the reading of the daily newspapers is concentrated to certain areas of the world. According to UNESCO-statistics 43 member nations of UN do not issue any daily newspaper at all. There is still a serious imbalance between developed and developing countries as regards availability of books and other reading materials. And this problem has to be solved, if we are to be successful in our strivings to eliminate illiteracy around the world - one of the most gigantic, challenging and urgent problems of today's world, as I see it, for the economic, cultural, social and political development of a country as well as for any individual's personality development.

UNESCO's World Literacy Program

Even when we use minimum standards for literacy - the number of illiterates in the world is surely underestimated. Despite all our previous efforts we are faced with a very disquieting picture at present. The number of adult illiterates, rather than being on the decline, is actually increasing at the rate of twenty-five to thirty million persons a year!

At least 65% of the world's population is estimated to fall below the level of functional literacy, when the criterion of a fourth grade level of reading ability is used.

Many million of those being able to read at the third grade level a number of years ago have lost this ability due to lack of practice.

Literacy campaigns in various parts of the world seem still largely to be based on a primer or series of elementary text books and some simple work-books. The literacy program is very often considered to be fulfilled, when the student has learned the alphabet and gone through the primers.

In some developing countries there is, however, introduced some kind of post-literacy phase of teaching, for instance in Tunisia, where they use a variety of more advanced readers (Petite Encyclopedie des Adultes). In many countries they now publish newspapers specificly designed for newly literate adults with large print. Radio and television programs aiming at assisting in the teaching of reading are appearing in an increasing number. But still there is in most developing countries a severe lack of

materials, useful for reading instruction to adults, and an enormous shortage of well qualified literacy experts for teacher education.

From my point of view UNESCO is right, when pointing out that the struggle for world-wide literacy requires considerable resources and that its success is determined in large parts by the financial possibilities. The developing countries have so far assumed the main financial burdens themselves, and the international aid has been of a marginal and complimentary character.

Many countries have started to change the former mass campaigns to what is called selective programs. As examples of this trend we may mention the reading program for recruits in Turkey, the education program for mothers of schoolchildren in Korea, the reading program for tobacco growers in Nigeria, etc.

UNESCO initiated and sponsored during the years 1964 to 1974 an Experimental World Literacy Program, which aimed at exploring and evaluating the relationship between literacy and economic and social development in various countries and trying out new strategies for teaching. In all some 55 countries participated in this program. Large scale functional literacy projects, sponsored by UNESCO, were i.a. carried out in the following twelve countries: Algeria, Ecuador, Iran, Mali, Ethiopia, Guinea, Madagascar, Sudan, Syria, India, Venezuela and Tanzania. Eight smaller experiments (micro experiments) were in operation in Algeria, Brazil, China, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Tunisia and Upper Volta.

I have come to the conclusion that the results of this program, although priceworthy as a pilot experiment, were rather limited in view of the enormous needs of efficient, more far-reaching literacy campaigns in all parts of the world. We may conclude from this rough overview that we cannot expect universal literacy to be reached during the next few decades, if we rely on schools for children alone. Adult illiteracy will remain for a foreseeable future, if we don't attack the problems from many other angles.

Whatever the strategy adopted will be we have to be completely aware of the fact that nothing is possible without a political willingness at the national level,imposing firm decisions on the choice of objectives and implementations of diversified programmes.

For the first time in the history of education in India, the government has given priority to campaigns against adult illiteracy and also for

the first time special plans are made to educate women. Out of 615 million people in India close to 400 million are illiterates. The present illiteracy rate for Indian women is 78%, compared to 45% for men. A massive National Adult Education program was launched on October 2, 1978, Gandhi's birthday, with the objective to extend educational opportunities to 100 million illiterate persons in the 15 - 35 age group before 1983-84.

Definitions of functional literacy

The statistics on literacy in the world today and projections for the decades ahead should inter alia be viewed in the light of the fact that there is a continuous evolution ongoing everywhere as regards definitions of what is meant by literacy.

The term "functional illiterate" and "functional illiteracy" have been widely accepted. They denote a form of educational inadequacy. But the exact definition of these terms will differ significantly in different countries and in different connections.

These terms are essentially negative. There is a great need for positive operational terms such as "functional literacy" and "functional literacy project" involving more precise statements of measuring instruments used, statements of aims, methodology, materials needed and so on, as has been to some extent used in some recent studies in my own country, Sweden.

The demands of the society are changing at a rapid rate. We may therefore find many persons, who are considered to be literate according to officially accepted criteria as to the number of years of schooling, having inadequate literacy skills to carry through activities dealing with documents and printed forms of various kinds according to normal and common demands put on them by their society. They are in other words no longer functionally literate in today's society.

As an example we may mention that the official statistics on illiteracy in U.S.A. shows that only around 1% of the population 14 years old and above is estimated to be illiterate. A pool conducted in 1970 indicated, however, that about 18.5 million Americans aged 16 and over cannot fill in standard forms required to obtain several vital, social services. A pool further showed

> that, on grounds of reading and writing disability alone, 4 million adults could not fill in forms required to get public welfare

> (unemployment) assistance, about 10 million people would have difficulty in qualifying for social security, over 11 million could not get a driver's licence (for which a written test is required), and 14 million could not apply for a bank loan. Illiteracy is closely tied to other social problems in the United States; it is estimated that approximately one-half of the unemployed between the ages of 16 and 21 are functionally illiterate, while about 60% of the nation's present inmates cannot read.
>
> (UNESCO, Paris, 1972)

Other countries around the world face similar problems as U.S.A. There does not exist any universally accepted definition of the term literacy.

UNESCO considers a person as "functionally literate" when he has completed 4 years of schooling. Such a definition suffers from considerable weaknesses. The reading skills acquired after four years of schooling are dependent of many factors, e.g. the capacity of the students, the experiences of the teachers, the size of the learning group, the methods used, the instructional materials, beginning age, etc. Added to that we have to take into consideration that in any fourth grade according to the results of my own studies in Sweden, we may expect a great range of reading achievement. Some students in the fourth grade remain at the first grade level of reading ability and others read as well as an average college student.

"Functional literacy" - a relative concept

I would like to state that "functional literacy" should be regarded as a relative concept. Thereby I have rejected definitions based on grade level or number of years of schooling.

I am willing to accept the definition offered by William Gray in his classical UNESCO-monograph from 1956 as a starting point:

> ... a person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group.
>
> (Gray, 1956, p. 24)

Such a definition may, however, be rightly critizised for being too vague.

The next step should from my point of view be analyses of the basic needs of adults in a specific national society as regards reading and writing skills. The literacy needs vary of course from individual to individual within a certain cultural group and also among groups of various kinds in

a given country. Different jobs in different cultural settings require different reading capacity levels. For instance, a restaurant servant may need a certain level of reading and writing capacity and a repairman within the electrical field would need another level of literacy. Nevertheless, there is a great need in any country to come to some kind of agreement as to which literacy levels and what kind of various skills the school should aim at giving the students.

Literacy - a developmental process

Literacy should be considered as a developmental process which is ongoing during the whole life-time of an individual from early childhood up to the adult age.

The development of literacy is proceeding in sequences. At each level there are certain general and certain specific reading skills to be mastered.

We can hardly claim that the school should be able to predict the individual student's future needs of reading and writing skills in a number of respects. It is reasonable, however, that we accept as one important task to try to delineate a minimal capacity level as to functional reading and writing skills in a certain country.

The desirable objective would then be that all students reach this minimal level before they leave school.

The assessment of minimum performance levels as regards reading and writing skills is a complex task. The criteria are undergoing continuous change. The needs of the individual will vary with the demands of the society and the individual situation. They differ from society to society. They may also differ considerably from one phase of a person's life to the next.

The main goals of a school's total program of the teaching of reading and writing are often at least in Western European countries indicated in relatively wide, general terms. From my point of view they need to be differentiated in more specific and more detailed subgoals for various levels and categories in order to be useful as starting points for a day-to-day and week-to-week lesson planning and also as an indication of those minimum requirements as regards reading and writing ability, considered necessary for everyone to master in order to be able to function in a given society. We should, however, be aware of the danger in putting too much

emphasis on minimum competency testing. We might lower our aspirations of the educational procedures and be too much and too easy satisfied with a minimum competency level for our students. We should not forget tc place emphasis also on excellence of performance in reading and writing.

A decline as regards literacy noted in many highly industrialized countries

The problem of functional literacy is indeed a universal, world-wide concern. We will find a certain tendency of decline as regards literacy in many highly industrialized countries in various parts of the world just now.

This was for instance stated in the final declaration of the international symposium on literacy in Persepolis, Iran, in 1975.

Such a trend has been noted in Great Britain for instance in some studies and the same is true as regards my own country, Sweden.

There are at least two million functionally illiterate adults in Great Britain according to a survey carried out by NFER. That means that about six per cent of the adult population is either completely unable to read or write or has a literacy level below that of an average nine year-old child. "Two million people who cannot participate fully in today's society, which is predominantly literate, two million people who have to abstain from the benefits, the stimulating experiences, exposed to the printed word and the engaging pleasures that most of us take for granted." There are according to the authors of this study many more who still have a reading age of between nine and thirteen years. The authors conclude that the reading comprehension standards of juniors in British schools have significantly declined since 1964.

Three recent research studies in Sweden comparing the achievement of school students during the 50's and 60's and mid 70's show inter alia that today's schoolchildren read at a somewhat higher speed but are considerably less proficient in reading comprehension, writing and spelling. Even creative writing composition /essay writing/ has detoriated according to these studies (Björnsson 1976a and 1976b, Grundin, 1975 and 1976 and Johansson, 1977).

Hans Grundin (1975 and 1976) has reported on a research project, aimed at describing the development of reading, writing and other communication skills among students aged 7 - 19 years in the Swedish schools. About

2 600 students were tested twice with test batteries including some ten different reading and writing tests.

The tests used in the study were of various kinds, some having school characteristics, for instance those measuring reading speed and comprehension, spelling and essay writing. Three of the ten tests, however, consist of tasks that anyone is likely to meet in everyday life, such as to interpret tables, read an insurance policy text and fill in forms used by the Post Office. These tests were supposed to measure everyday's skills in reading and writing needed for an individual to function in today's Swedish society.

Only a few of the most interesting results can be pointed out here. There seems to be a continuous increase in the skills studied throughout the school years - except for students in vocational courses in the upper secondary school, where stagnation and even regression in grade 11 are quite common.

The typical growth curve for the total age interval (7 - 19 years) is negatively accelerated. The growth speed is highest in grade 1 and then it diminishes with increasing grade level. The development of reading and writing skills is studied for various subgroups of students: For normal learners versus intellectually backward learners, for different socio-economic strata, etc. On the whole, the differences between subgroups in performance level, which exist after the first school year, tend to remain constant or increase only moderately during the comprehensive school years. There is no indication that the school has the effect of closing or diminishing the gaps between student groups at different performance levels. High performers in the first grades continue to be high performers through the grades, and low performers similarly remain low performers. The size of the differences in performance level is reported to be considerable in many cases. The performance level of the bottom 10% in grade 9, for instance, is not higher than the average level in grade 3.

The results indicate the enormous importance of the child's development in the early formative years before school age. Thinking and language develop simultaneously. The extension of meaning in language is a life-time process. But lack of adequate training in the early years of life may seriously hamper the development of an individual's later reading performance and his whole personality development. A poor verbal environment in which the adults seldom speak to the child and the conversation is limited in extent

and variety will negatively influence the child's developing good speaking ability and, thereby, will cause great reading problems later on.

According to the results of this study, around 15% of the Swedish students leave the comprehensive nine year school without having reached the sixth grade level of reading ability. In other words, they are not able to function in an adequate way in today's Swedish society. These distressing and discouraging facts have created a lively discussion in Swedish massmedia as regards the objectives, means, and results of the teaching of reading in Swedish schools.

Literacy work among immigrants in Western Europe

Western Europe has become the principal area for immigration in the world. Immigrants and their families represent a mass of 12.200.000 people in Western Europe today.

It is necessary to add to these figures the large number of clandestine migrants (secret immigrants), most of them from Africa but also from a number of Asian countries.

Many of the children beginning school in West Germany today are the children of immigrants. For example, in a city like Duisburg 50% of the seven-year-olds are immigrant children. Between 1970-1978 there have been born around 600.000 immigrant children i West Germany. Out of these children 25 - 30% do not attend school at all.

During the major part of this century, Sweden has been considered to be a country without any illiterates at all. However, the increased immigration from Mediterranean and non-European countries during the 60's and 70's has actualized once again in the Swedish educational system the issue of literacy training for adults. About 10% of the Swedish population (by now c. 800.000) consist of people having immigrated to Sweden from various countries during the last two decades. It has been calculated that around forty thousand adults in Sweden now lack basic knowledge of reading and writing and must be considered illiterates. If we bring in the "functional literacy aspect" the figure will become far bigger. A program has been set up which is supposed to cover all adult immigrants and other persons who are in need of literacy training. The municipalities are in charge of the courses and are to inform immigrants living in the municipality of the existence of the courses, but the State finances the courses.

In 1976, the Parliament approved of a proposal by the Government to introduce a special State system of study allowances for participants in the municipal literacy training courses.

In a Bill to the Parliament in 1977 it is stated that both immigrants and native Swedes have the right to participate in the literacy courses but in the case of immigrants the aim of the literacy training is not to promote their knowledge of Swedish, but their ability to read and write. I would like to add to this the comment that at present there are in some Swedish areas spoken as many as 40 different languages among the children in the elementary schools. In other words the Swedish teachers are confronted with extremely difficult problems in the teaching of reading at all levels by now. The same situation will be noted in many other West European countries.

Some successful national mass campaigns for the elimination of illiteracy

Some encouraging traits in the picture of literacy education should not be forgotten. Mass campaigns aiming at the eradication of illiteracy have had remarkable success in some parts of the world. For instance the campaign in Cuba in the year of 1961 managed to largely eliminate the illiteracy in the whole country. In China there seems to have been a similar success in that sense that between 1949 and today illiteracy has been reduced from about 85% to approximately 15-20%.

Through a systematic national program the U.S.S.R. has also been successful in eliminating illiteracy in the country with the exception of some few rural areas, where the illiteracy is still prevailing.

The "Right to Read" campaign in the United States is the most promising initiative taken so far within one individual country. My sincere hope is that the strategy chosen will prove successful and will be useful as a model for other countries. In spite of the admirable work already accomplished by the International Reading Association and other groups - much remains to be done before all peoples around the world are assured reading ability.

Yesterday I learned to know from a representative of The Ministry of Education that in the Philippines the percentage of literate adults has increased from around 80% to around 92% during the last ten-year-period. Indeed rewarding and impressive results! May I be allowed to express our great appreciation and admiration to the teachers in the Philippines for these excellent results.

A rather pessimistic evaluation of the situation is recently made by UNESCO:

> On the whole, however, ... whether United Nations related or not, functional literacy activities tend to be limited, fragmented and incidental. The 'eventual World Campaign for the Eradication of Man Illiteracy' for which the Secretary-General of the United Nations hoped a decade ago, ... is certainly no nearer than when the programme began.
>
> (UNESCO, 1976, p. 190)

In many countries experimentation is ongoing in order to find new organizational patterns for literacy training of adults using a functional approach. The UNESCO World Literacy Programs has within its pilot projects given many valuable contributions to the theory and practice to selecting and training of teachers and also groups of non-professionals usually called "volunteers" - students, soldiers, and members of various service organisations. Radio and television are often used in training of literacy teachers and other literacy personnel in a number of countries (so far examples in e.g. Mali, Zambia, Colombia, Jugoslavia, Egypt, Chile, Tunisia and Brazil).

The need of cross-national comparative reading studies

Our knowledge of the various aspects of primary reading is still very limited. There is a great need for cross-national comparative studies of different methods of instruction e.g. in beginning reading, involving countries with varying ages of school entrance, ranging from five to seven.

A cross-national study of the initial stages of learning to read would focus on the effectiveness of different methods of teaching, related to the characteristics of languages and to different ages at entering school.

The kinds of questions that might be posed are:

1. Is it easier for beginners to learn to read a language that has more regular letter-sound correspondence?
2. Will disadvantaged groups profit by an earlier age of school entry?
3. In what ways will the efficiency of a particular method or combination of methods in learning to read vary with language structure, background of the child, and age of school entry?

Such a cross-national study's implications for educational practice will contribute to a better basis for decision-making of some vital issues of

primary reading. The age of school entrance, for instance, and its implications for achievement are not readily studied within countries, so the cross-national comparison will lead to a better assessment of this factor. It is not only a question of which entrance age produces the highest reading attainment at the age of nine years, but also a question of possible differences as to the learning sequence among groups of children who start learning to read at different ages.

Considerations of a varied set of linguistic differences could lead to clearer insights regarding how best to simplify materials for beginning readers. The understanding of the interactions of linguistic variables and the impact of primary reading instruction on beginners of different ages should provide information of value to countries considering lowering or raising the age of school entrance. Should the child be kept longer in preschool and the start of reading instruction consequently be delayed? Or should the child leave his preschool environment earlier and enter school earlier? Once in school, should he be taught to read immediately? These and similar questions are asked in many countries and the availability of crossnational data concerning these problems may well make it possible to reach better answers.

It is important that we realize that in our explorations we are not alone, in any country. I want to underscore this fact and to urge us all to engage in cooperation across national lines, in cooperation between teachers of reading and researchers from various countries, in short in cooperation on a truly interdisciplinary and international scale.

Some international problems of literacy education

What kind of strategies, what kind of programs and materials have been successful in the work for improving literacy within various professional, social, ethnic and linguistic groups within different countries?
How has the problem of integrating the formal education system with functional literacy training for adults been solved in different countries?
What has been done to help migrant workers to acquire reading and writing ability in the language of their new home country? (A very urgent and obtrusive problem in many countries, not least in Europe.)
What can be accomplished through literacy courses for adults over radio and television, in schools and in industrial and administrative facilities, not fully occupied, and where some few qualified helpers are available?

How can latent human resources be best used in adult literacy campaigns? (For instance, teachers, students, soldiers, workers in industries, members of voluntary international charity organisations of various kinds, retired still vital people with various professional training etc.)

What do we really know?

What kind of properly controlled evaluative studies on the effects of adult literacy training from various parts of the world are available?
How can international exchange of ideas and experiences as regards literacy development be facilitated?
What can the International Reading Associaltion do? What can we as individuals do in this respect?

Some suggestions as regards future national and international literacy work

A. I.R.A. might wish to stimulate the government of each country belonging to the U.N.

   a. to carry out a survey of the literacy level within various geographical areas of the country, within various linguistic, social and ethnic groups and within various age groups and involving both sexes;

   b. to develop national norms for functional literacy for different groups of citizens in the country;

   c. to investigate the possibilities to increase the resources for literacy development and make more efficient use of already available resources (for instance economic resources; personal resources, audiovisual aids etc.)

B. I.R.A. might wish to encourage its national affiliates all around the world to establish special literacy secretariats or literacy centers to act as consulting and stimulating agencies for the carrying out of these above mentioned national surveys, to bring together the information and experiences reached upon in the national surveys and to ask the I.R.A. publications committee to prepare a literacy development survey on a world-wide basis.

C. I.R.A. might wish to create an own World Literacy Development Fund or join the UNESCO activities of a similar kind.

D. Out of all the research activities carried out within the field of reading has so far only an extremely small portion been devoted to the problem of adult illiteracy - maybe the most gigantic and demanding one of our generation. IRA could stimulate also this kind of research through its expertise and Literacy Fund.

E. I.R.A. might wish to encourage universities to establish reading centers in various parts of the world to carry out research in the important area of adult literacy.

F. I.R.A. might wish to locate certain specific areas in developing countries, in which to be of special assistance on a try-out basis in campaigns against illiteracy e.g. through some interested reading research departments at universities all around the world, where I.R.A.-members are in charge, in cooperation with UNESCO and national governments in question.

G. I.R.A. might take the initiative to a meeting (e.g. at the U.N. building in New York or at the UNESCO house in Paris) with one or two representatives from each of some world-wide organisation, e.g. U.N. Development Programme, UNESCO, WCCTP, FAO, WHO, ILO, to discuss possible plans of action within the vast area of world literacy.

H. IRA might wish to create a "Nobel Price" in literacy to be presented each year on September 8 (World Literacy Day, proclaimed by UN).

I. Further suggestions for financing of literacy campaigns.
The following institutions and individuals should be asked to donate the whole-day income of the 8th of September 1981 to a literacy campaign (local, regional, national or world-wide; in the latter case through cooperation between IRA and other world organisations of the kind indicated under item G above)

a) All companies producing and publishing books

b) All newspapers and magazines

c) All firms connected with the communication business, such as TV- and radio companies, mass-, press- and advertising agencies

d) All producers of teaching materials of various kinds, manufacturers of TV-sets, radio-receivers, radio-transmitters etc.

e) Each individual teacher at all levels - from preschool to university

Necessary to raise our aims concerning functional literacy

From my point of view, the struggle against illiteracy is one of the most important and also one of the most gigantic and demanding tasks of our present generation. This task has as I see it two facets:

1. To eliminate illiteracy

2. To raise the standard of functional literacy

In view of the technological revolution which promises to affect, within a few years' time, essentially all parts of the earth,it is time, in my opinion, to raise our aims as to functional literacy. We can no longer be content with a fourth grade standard of reading ability. In my view this needs to be greatly raised, at least to a ninth grade level. In many highly industralized countries workers will by 1985 need a reading capacity of a twelfth grade standard in order to read effectively instructions and blueprints, but At least a ninth grade reading proficiency will be required. And referring to my earlier discussion then: All grade level definitions of functional literacy should be transferred into pragmatic and operational terms and be subject to continuous evaluation and modification.

We can anticipate that children who this year, 1980, enter the first grade of the elementary schools all around the world, and whose professional, productive, mature lives will span the years 1990 - 2040, because of the rapid rate of change, have to make at least three of four changes in occupation. A person's reading ability, his study skills, how he can gather data, digest it, how he can engage in critical and reflective thinking, how he is able to see, detect, and envisage new problems, how he can reach beyond what the writer has been able to transfer on to the printed page, how he can be constructive, vibrant, divergent, and able to realize the dimension called creative reading, will have an important bearing on his ability to function in tomorrow's society. The heavy flow of data and information from computers will create reading problems of great significance. Without proper training in making intelligent decisions as to the exact kind of information we need, and the ability to do rapid, selective reading not only what to read but also what not to read, we will drown in the informational deluge.

How can we use the technological revolution in the teaching of reading? Tape recorders, tele satellites, flashing programs on the teaching of reading for schools and homes world-wide, teaching machines, language

laboratories, small computers for the teacher's desk, electronic devices for the translation of speeches on reading in different languages - all are great aims. But there is a need for research on the effectiveness of these techniques, their limitations and areas of usefulness and in ways of integrating them with more conventional methods into the daily teaching in the classrom. Research is also needed on how best to train teachers in the use of these aids.

Because of the great magnitude of the problems of illiteracy in the world of today, because of my awareness of the many tragedies and miseries of life in the form of hunger, poverty, diseases, alienation, yes, also such social failures as unemployment and all kinds of violence and crime, which to a great extent are related to lack of reading and writing ability, I would like to strongly recommend a transfer from words to deeds, from theories to action, in an intensification of efforts to eradicate illiteracy, effectively, in all countries of the earth.

You can each of you in your own community, your own region, your own country, urge the authorities to have reviews carried out of the situation as regards reading ability. In such a way a necessary starting point for continued efficient work has been established.

We have all of us as reading specialists great responsibilities to undertake in this respect and so has of course I.R.A. We cannot just nod benevolently and say yes. - We must do something.

I trust that all of you assembled here today, will agree with me, when I say we should not grow weary to repeatedly call for world-wide literacy campaigns through the joint efforts of national authorities and international agencies, until this enormously, far-reaching, gigantic problem has been properly attacked and solved.

Let our goal be:

Efficient reading ability for at least 90% of the adult population in 90% of the various nations around the world by 1990!

We cannot afford to wait any longer! A decade is short. We must act without further delay. The time to act is not tomorrow! It is right now!